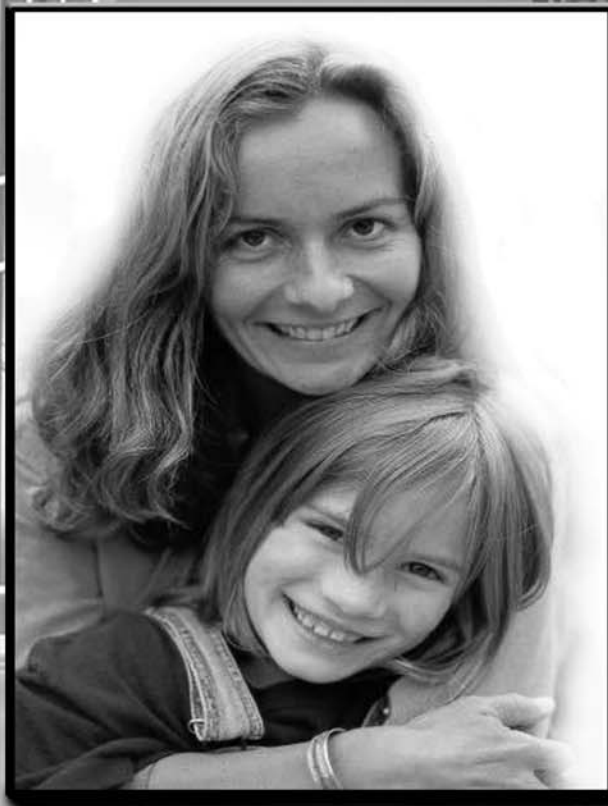


OKLAHOMA STUDY OF INCARCERATED MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN PHASE 1




SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 48

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OCTOBER 29, 2004

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The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) is pleased to release the first in a series of three reports regarding the Study of Incarcerated Women and their Children. The second and third report will provide more detail about the children and their current caretakers. This report is being issued under the authority of Senate Joint Resolution Forty-Eight.

Senate Joint Resolution Forty-Eight directs the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth to take the lead and work with the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Corrections, to study the living conditions of children of incarcerated women and make reports with recommendations that will help break the destructive cycles and restore the opportunities for the children to live healthy and productive lives.

This report contains demographic and other useful information regarding incarcerated mothers and their children. A few of the highlights include:

- Oklahoma's female prison population is the largest per capita in the country with 2,351 prisoners as of July 31, 2004.
- Nearly 49.8% of the mothers surveyed were incarcerated for drug offenses.
- Barely 1% of the women surveyed reported they had participated in programs or counseling with members of their families since coming to prison.
- Only 20% of the women reported visits once a month or more often with their children who had been living with them.
- There is evidence of intergenerational imprisonment.
- Mothers reported that their children experienced problems with depression, trouble with friends and guardians, and their grades suffered after the mother was incarcerated.

It is the OCCY's intention to develop recommendations to reduce the trauma children suffer as a result of the incarceration of their mothers.

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth would like to thank Senator Debbe Leftwich and Representative Barbara Staggs for recognizing the seriousness of this issue and sponsoring this worthwhile initiative. We would also like to thank the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Human Services for their cooperation with the study and participation in the task force meetings. A special thank you goes to Dr. Susan Sharp for her dedication to Oklahoma's children and their families.

Respectfully,

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Oklahoma Study of Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children – Phase I

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Presented to the Oklahoma Commission on Children
and Youth

October 29, 2004

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Description of the Study

Oklahoma's female prison population is the largest per capita in the country, with 2,351 prisoners as of July 31, 2004. In the first phase of the study, 203 female prisoners were administered a survey containing questions on demographics, criminal record, and information about families such as contact with children, placement of children, and problems with children. This is less than the proposed 250 women due to refusal of a substantial number of those randomly selected for participation at Mabel Bassett (random sample was of 132 women). Subjects came from four facilities: Turley Halfway House (n=14, 6.9%), Hillside Community Correctional Center (n=41, 20.2%), Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (n=92, 45.3%), and Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (n=56, 27.6%). The sample drawn was stratified to get a representative number of prisoners from each level of incarceration. The response rate at Turley was 66.7%, at Hillside it was 78.8%, at Eddie Warrior it was 87.6%, but at Mabel Bassett only 42.4% participated in the survey. One reason for this was that several of the women selected in the random sampling were incarcerated for harming their children. Additionally, the prisoners at Mabel Bassett were less interested in participating once they realized that there would be no direct benefit to themselves. This may be a reflection of the more serious nature of the offenses of these women as well as their unwillingness to assist in research.

Prisoners with minor children were asked to provide contact information for a second survey (Phase II). In Phase II, a minimum of 50 women prisoners (maximum of 100) will be asked detailed information about their mental health and substance abuse histories, history of domestic violence and abuse, and their children's caretakers. They will also be asked to provide the researcher with contact information for their children's caretakers. A Federal Certificate of Confidentiality has been requested for Phase II as well as Phase III. As of October 14, 2004, the certificate has not been received, thus preventing data collection for the second phase. However, 96 prisoners did volunteer to participate in the second phase and provided information indicating that they met the screening criteria (children under 18 with whom they lived prior to incarceration). Additionally, several women who were pregnant want to participate, and a few who have been incarcerated many years but did have minor children have asked to participate. I would like to include these women, adapting the survey to their situations. As soon as the Certificate of Confidentiality is received, we will collect and enter the Phase II data and begin contacting caretakers for participation in Phase III, the interviews with caretakers of the prisoners' children.

Demographics

The demographic data of the sample are presented in Table 1. The subjects in Phase 1 ranged in age from 20 to 71, with a mean age of 35.8 and a median age of 35. More than one-third (34.5%) of the women were between the ages of 30 and 39. More than half of the sample was white (n=114, 56.2%), and an additional 53 (16.1%) were African American. The sample contained only 21 Native Americans (10.3%) and six Hispanics (3.0%). Nine subjects described their race as “other” (4.4%).

In terms of education, 74 subjects had not completed high school (37.0%), and 17 (8.5%) had an eighth grade education or less. An additional 62 (31.0%) reported that high school graduation or a GED represented their highest educational attainment. Additionally, 27 women (13.5%) reported vocational or technical training, and 33 (16.5%) had some college. Only four women (2.0%) had a college degree. Three women did not report their education. Clearly, the majority of these women have low educational attainment.

Forty-one percent (n=41) of the women living with a child in the home prior to incarceration reported full-time employment prior to their arrests. Eleven percent (n = 11) reported part-time work. For the entire sample, this number was slightly lower (n=72, 35.5% full-time and n=20, 9.9% part-time).

In terms of the offenses for which they are in prison, nearly half (n=101, 49.8%) were in for drug offenses. Among those who had a child in the home prior to incarceration, a slightly smaller number reported this as their controlling offense (n=44, 44.0%). The second most common offense reported was theft (n=24, 11.8% of total sample, n=14, 14.0% of mother with children in home). Sixteen women were incarcerated for murder or manslaughter (7.9%), with nine of the mothers with children in the home (9.0%) reporting this as their controlling offense.

Race appears to be a factor in the likelihood of incarceration. For white women, this was more likely than for blacks or other races to be their first incarceration despite prior felony convictions. In Figure 1, the graph demonstrates that the mean number of prior felony convictions was higher for white women for whom this was the first time incarcerated as compared to other races. The mean number of prior felony convictions was also higher for white women than for black women who were in prison for the second time. The current data set lacks information on seriousness of offense, however, so caution should be used in interpreting this.

There is evidence of intergenerational imprisonment. Seventeen (8.4%) reported their mother had gone to prison, 7 (7.0%) of whom had children living in the home at the time of incarceration. Thirty-seven (18.2%) reported their

father had gone to prison, with sixteen (16.0%) of the mothers with children in the home reporting their father's incarceration. Seven (3.4%) reported a grandparent had gone to prison, with three of these having children in the home (3.0%). A large number also reported that an aunt or uncle had been in prison. Twenty-nine percent (n=58) of the total population and thirty percent of the mothers who had children living with them (n=30) reported an aunt or uncle had been to prison, with three in each group reporting both an aunt or uncle had gone to prison (overlap accounted for in the above numbers). In one case, the prisoner reported both her mother and a grandparent had been to prison. A total of 279 incarcerations of relatives were reported by the 203 women. Among the 100 women who had minor children in the home, 133 relatives who had been incarcerated were reported. Of the total sample, 139 women reported one or more relatives had been incarcerated, while 70 of the women who had children in the home reported a relative had been incarcerated. It is very evident that for the majority of the women, imprisonment is somewhat familiar due to familial incarcerations.

Children of Incarcerated Mothers

Female inmates are almost twice as likely as male inmates to report that they had a child of their own living with them prior to their arrest. Thus, their imprisonment is more likely to disrupt the children's living arrangements.

Females are also significantly less likely than males to say those children are now living with their other parent. Taken in conjunction, these two statistics emphasize the fact that children of incarcerated mothers may find themselves not only without their mother but also without their home (Mumola 2000).

Children Living With Mother Prior to Her Incarceration

In the current study, approximately half the women who responded to the survey (n=100) reported one or more children had been living with them at the time of their arrest. An additional six women were pregnant. The number of children living with the women prisoners at time of arrest is reported in Table 2.

Of the women who did have a minor child in the home at the time of incarceration, 33 had one child and 35 had two children. An additional 18 reported three children living with them. Only a few women reported more than three children in the home, with five reporting four children, six reporting five children, two reporting six children, and one reporting nine children. The total number of children living with a mother at the time of her incarceration in this study was 228 children, and an additional six women were pregnant.

Children living with their mothers prior to incarceration ranged in age from 0 to 18, with a mean age of 3.15 years. The low mean is primarily due to a large number of children under the age of one year.

Placement of Children During Mother's Incarceration

The children who had been living with their mothers prior to the mothers' imprisonment have had to be placed with others. Oklahoma Statute Title 22, Section 20, deals with the incarceration of a custodial parent. Under this statute, the court is required to determine whether any person sentenced to incarceration in the state penal system is the single custodial parent of a minor child. If the individual is a single custodial parent, the court is to determine what arrangements have been made for the placement of the child during the parent's imprisonment (paragraph A). If the child is to be placed with the other parent, a friend or a family member, the court is required to have a placement study.

The person making the investigation and report to the court shall be a person qualified by training or experience as designated by the court; provided, the court shall give preference to designating an appropriately licensed or certified individual or agency to complete the investigation. The placement investigation shall include inquiry to determine whether the proposed home is a suitable one for the child and any other circumstances and conditions which may have a bearing on the health, safety and welfare of the child. The report shall become a part of the files in the case and shall contain a definite recommendation for or against the proposed placement and the reason therefore.

No data has been located to determine whether this type of placement study is being undertaken in the placement of children. Prior research in Oklahoma

suggests that children are being placed in homes with a history of abuse (Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza 2001).

Table 3 reports the placement of the children who were living with their mothers prior to incarceration. Twenty-four (18.3%) were living with their other parent, although in five cases there were other family members in the home. Thirty-two (24.4%) were living with their mother's mother, one with their mother's father (0.8%), while an additional twelve (9%) were living with both her mother and father. Nine lived with their mother's sibling (6.9%), three with her grandparents (2.3%), and ten (7.6%) with other relatives.

A smaller proportion lived with their father's family members. Five (3.8%) lived with the father's mother, three lived with their father's father (2.3%), while one (0.8%) lived with the father's parents together. Six (4.6%) lived with other relatives of the father.

Three (2.3%) women reported children living with friends, six (4.6%) reported children in a foster home, two (1.5%) reported children with a state agency, and one reported not knowing where (0.8%) the child was. An additional thirteen (9.9%) women indicated the category "other". This may include children who have been adopted since the mother's incarceration.

Children Not Living With Their Mother Prior to Her Incarceration

While the children that lived with their mothers prior to incarceration were most likely to be affected, we cannot ignore the impact that incarceration of the mother may have had on those children not living with her at the time she went to prison. Fifty nine of the women reported minor children who had not been living with them at the time of incarceration. Twenty reported one child not in the home, eighteen reported two children, thirteen reported three children, and seven reported four or more children. This resulted in 131 additional children with an incarcerated mother. The women were asked whether they had regular contact at least once a month with the child prior to coming to prison. The women responded that they had had regular contact at least once a month with 99 of the children. Furthermore, they indicated that they paid child support for 30 (22.9%) of the children who were not living with them at the time they went to prison. These numbers suggest that it is not just children who lived with their mothers who have been affected by their incarceration, and we should keep this in mind. (See Table 4)

Problems Experienced by Children

Children are affected in many ways when a parent is incarcerated. This may lead to a host of problems for these children. In particular, academic performance, conflict with friends and caretakers, and alcohol and drug problems may be prevalent. This may be particularly true when a mother is incarcerated, especially one who was the only adult in the household.

In the current study, I have focused on those mothers who had a child living with them prior to incarceration (n=100). In Table 5, I report problems the children have had since the mother's incarceration, including a separate report of those among whom the problems occurred both before and since incarceration and those who had problems prior to incarceration of their mother. Depression was the problem most often reported by the mothers. Thirty-six women reported one or more of their children had developed problems with depression since their incarceration, while an additional seven reported that depression had been a problem both before and since their incarceration. The women reported depression in a child prior to incarceration in only four cases. In eight cases, the women reported a child being suicidal, with one woman reporting a suicidal child prior to her incarceration.

A number of women also reported their children were having problems in school. Bad grades were the most frequent problem (27%) followed by

dropping out (14%), and being expelled (10%). Comparable percentages for those reporting a problem both before and since incarceration were 6%, 1%, and 2% respectively. However, 15% reported children having bad grades prior to incarceration, with 5% reporting a child expelled and 4% reporting a child dropping out prior to the mother's incarceration.

Trouble with parents/guardians was also a frequent issue (30%, compared to 4% reporting it as a problem both before and since incarceration and 6% reporting it as a problem prior to incarceration). Sixteen percent reported alcohol and drug problems in their children. In four cases, the problem was with alcohol or drugs only. In the other cases, the children were experiencing problems with both. Only three parents reported this had been a problem both before and since incarceration, and an additional four reported drug or alcohol problems in their children prior to their incarceration.

Thirteen women reported children who had been arrested since incarceration, and there were two whose children had been arrested both prior and since incarceration. Three women reported a child arrested prior to their imprisonment.

It is noteworthy that only fourteen of the women reported they had participated in programs or counseling with members of their families since coming to prison. Furthermore, only forty of the women reported visits once a

month or more often from children who had been living with them. This suggests a serious potential problem. Not only is the mother no longer in the home, but the children are not able to have face-to-face contact with her on a regular basis. Many of these mothers plan to reunite with their children upon release. With limited contact between mothers and children during the period, reintegration may be more difficult.

The length of time the mother has already been in prison appears to be a factor in problems experienced by the children. For several of the problematic behaviors, no problem was reported by women who had currently served less than two years. Alcohol problems, drug problems, dropping out of school, and children arrested or incarcerated were reported only by women who had served two or more years on their current sentences. Bad grades and trouble with parent or guardian were reported frequently by women who had served less than one year. In both cases, however, more than half of these behaviors were reported by women who had been incarcerated two or more years. Additionally, half of the women who reported a child was suicidal had been incarcerated between six and twenty-four months. These findings suggest that interested parties should be aware that school problems, problems with guardians and suicidal ideation may surface shortly after incarceration of the mother, while other problems may develop over time.

Recommendations

It is clear that at least from the perceptions of their mothers, these children are experiencing considerable distress and problems. In Phase II, we will be turning to a closer examination of the mother's life histories as well as the children's current situations. Then, in Phase III, we will be asking caretakers about their perceptions as well as services they may have obtained for the children. Researchers should study inmates' families as well as caretakers to gain a clearer perspective on the unintended consequences of incarceration. The recommendations stemming from this study are preliminary. Upon completion of Phase II and Phase III, further recommendations may be made.

The findings suggest that the state should consider focusing on alternative sanctions such as day reporting centers or nighttime incarceration when possible. Furthermore, the state should try to provide services to children to intervene before serious problems develop. When incarceration is the appropriate response to the crime, it is imperative to ensure that the provisions of Oklahoma Statute Title 22, Chapter 20 are being carried out. Thorough assessment of the homes where the mothers plan to place their children is needed. Furthermore, records of where the children are living will assist in providing services to the children.

Additionally, thorough assessment of the children themselves would be beneficial. Determination of the problems being experienced would assist the state in providing services to these children. This preliminary study has documented that there is considerable intergenerational incarceration in the state. In order to break the cycle, early intervention is extremely important.

The statute cited above deals with children who were living with their mothers prior to incarceration. However, a large group of children that were not living with their mothers were still in regular contact with them and in numerous cases the mothers were contributing to their support. Identifying and assessing these children is also important.

Depending on the crime committed by the mother, the length of sentence, and the mother's resources, some mothers and their children will be reunified after the mothers' sentences are served. The services required by families that will be reunified will probably differ in some ways from those that will not be reunified. Therefore, it would be beneficial to attempt to identify these two groups in order to focus on appropriate services and interventions from the children.

Contact between mothers and their children can be extremely beneficial to the child. For one thing, seeing the mother may help reassure a child about the mother's situation (Parke and Clarke-Stewart 2003). Additionally, the mother-

child bond can be better maintained with regular contact. Mother-child contact is most beneficial when the mother plans to live with her children after release. There are a number of churches and support groups that work to facilitate visitation between incarcerated parents and their children in Oklahoma. One recommendation is to network with these groups. Another recommendation is to ensure there are child-friendly visitation areas at the facilities in order to minimize the trauma to the children.

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Figure 1. Number of Incarcerations by Prior Felony Convictions

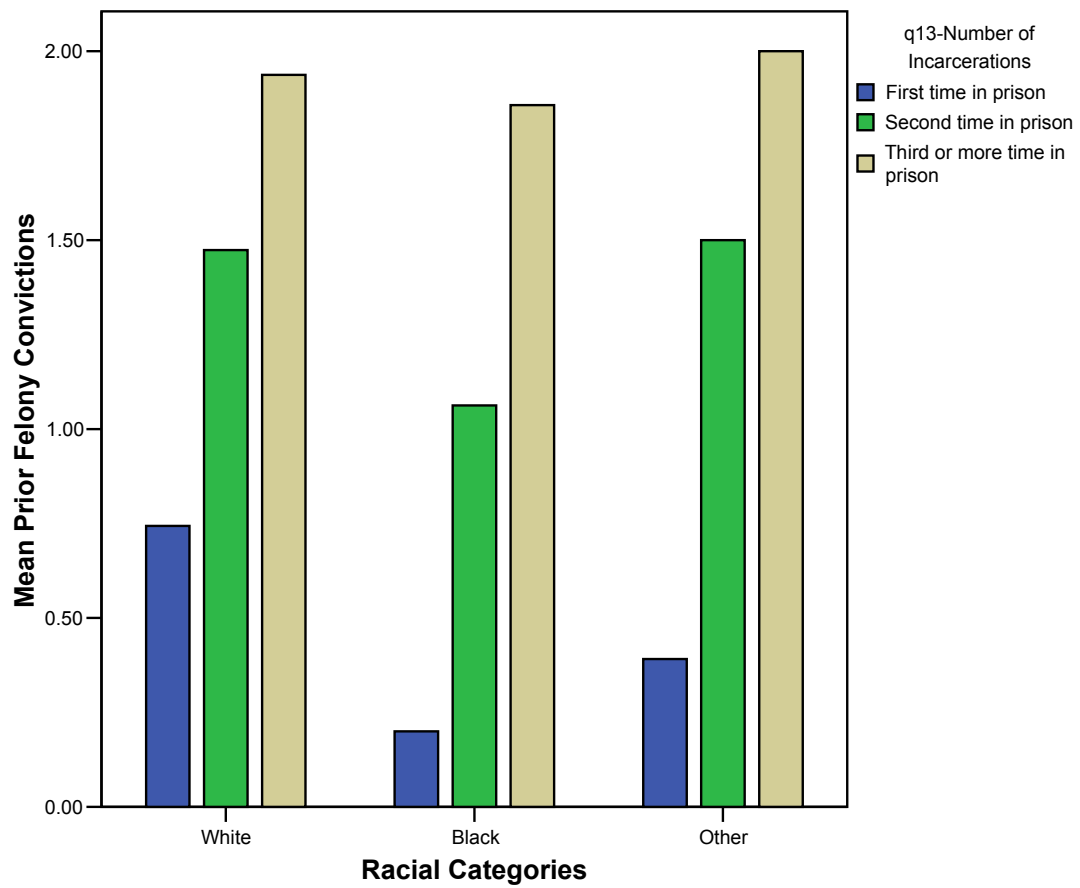


Table 1. Demographics

	N	Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>FACILITY</i>			
Turley	14	6.9%	6.9%
Hillside	41	20.2%	27.1%
Eddie Warrior	92	45.3%	72.4%
Mabel Bassett	56	27.6%	100%
<i>AGE</i>			
20-24	21	10.3%	10.3%
25-29	36	17.7%	28.1%
30-34	37	18.2%	46.3%
35-39	33	16.3%	62.6%
40-44	38	18.7%	81.3%
45-49	27	13.3%	94.6%
50 and older	11	5.4%	100.0%
<i>RACE/ETHNICITY</i>			
African American	53	26.1%	26.1%
Hispanic	6	3.0%	29.1%
White	114	56.2%	85.3%
Native American	21	10.3%	95.6%
Asian	0	0%	
Other	9	4.4%	100.0%
<i>EDUCATION*</i>			
Less than HS	74	37.0%	37.0%
HS Grad/GED	62	31.0%	68.0%
Some college	33	16.5%	84.5%
Vo-Tech	27	13.5%	98.0%
BA degree or higher	4	2.0%	100.0%

* Three women did not report information on their educational status

Table 2. Number of Children Living with Incarcerated Mother at the Time of Her Arrest

Number of Children	N	Percentage of Total Sample	Cumulative Percentage (as percentage of total sample)
1	33	16.3%	16.3%
2	35	17.2%	33.5%
3	18	8.9%	42.4%
4	5	2.5%	44.9%
5	6	3.0%	47.9%
6	2	1.0%	48.9%
9	1	0.5%	49.4%
Pregnant	<u>6</u>	3.0%	
Total number of children	234		

Table 3. Mothers' Report of Placement of Children Who Were Living With Them Prior to Their Incarceration

Where Children are Currently Living	N*
With Children's Father	24
With Mother's Mother	32
With Mother's Father	1
With Mother's Parents	12
With Mother's Siblings	9
With Mother's Grandparents	3
With Mother's Other Relatives	10
With Father's Mother	5
With Father's Father	3
With Both of Father's Parents	1
With Father's Siblings	1
With Father's Grandparents	1
With Father's Other Relatives	4
With Friends	3
In Foster Care	6
In State Agency	2
Unsure	1
Other (Not specified)	13

* Excludes overlapping placement, i.e. with mother and father, mother and siblings, etc.

Table 4. Number of Children Not Living with Incarcerated Mother at the Time of Her Arrest

Number of Children	N	Percentage of Total Sample	Cumulative Percentage (as percentage of total sample)
1	20	9.9%	9.9%
2	19	9.4%	19.3%
3	13	6.4%	25.7%
4	2	1.0%	26.7%
5	4	2.0%	28.7%
6	1	0.5%	29.2%
Total number of children	131		

Table 5. Problems Experienced by Children

Problems Experienced By Children	Before Incarceration Only	Both Before and Since Incarceration	Since Incarceration Only
Bad Grades	15	6	27
Expelled from School	5	2	10
Dropped Out of School	4	1	14
Trouble with Friends	3	0	16
Trouble with Guardians	6	4	30
Running Away	2	0	11
Arrested	3	2	13
Incarcerated	1	3	9
Alcohol Problems	1	1	12
Drug Problems	3	2	12
Depression	4	7	36
Suicidal	1	0	8
Became pregnant or got someone else pregnant	0	0	9